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Mandated areas

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United Nations Development Programme**

Background and context

1. The lessons learned from country and regional engagement, together with global consultations with indigenous peoples' organizations, fed into and informed the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) policy document entitled "UNDP and indigenous peoples: a policy of engagement". Underpinned by the international human rights framework, the policy recognizes indigenous peoples' rights and their vital role and contribution to development.

2. Rooted in the goals of the United Nations Millennium Declaration, the objective of the policy is to provide UNDP staff with a framework to guide their work in building sustainable partnerships with indigenous peoples. It underlines the main principles guiding that relationship. Those partnerships are aimed at fostering an enabling environment that promotes indigenous peoples' participation in all decision-making levels; ensures the coexistence of their economic, cultural, and sociopolitical systems with others; and develops the capacity of Governments to build more inclusive policies and programmes. The policy establishes priority areas of engagement, ranging from poverty to issues related to ownership and use of land and natural resources; protection of cultural and intellectual property; and participation in political processes. Moreover, it endorses the principle of free prior informed consent in development programmes, and recognizes indigenous peoples' right to development. The policy provides practical mechanisms for operational and policy engagement at the global, regional and country levels.

3. The rationale for UNDP engagement with indigenous peoples and their organizations is grounded in the UNDP mandated areas of work; processes and agreements of development cooperation; and the aspirations of indigenous peoples.

* E/C.19/2003/1.
** The present document was submitted late to ensure the inclusion of the most recent information.

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The UNDP coordinating role at the country level, its human development paradigm, advocacy of democratic governance and policy of mainstreaming human rights positions makes it a key partner for pursuing a more holistic approach to development. Moreover, the UNDP country and regional presence and the relationship of trust it has with Governments and civil society partners enables UNDP to play a unique role in bringing together different stakeholders in development processes. That mandate can serve as a critical entry point and foundation for supporting more inclusive development policies and programmes; brokering dialogues with all actors; facilitating participatory approaches; and creating the political space for alternative views to be shared.

Policy implementation

Programmes

4. In efforts to implement the UNDP policy of engagement with indigenous peoples, a regional programme in Asia has been developed. Participating countries include Cambodia, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam. Its focus is on strengthening the policy dialogue on indigenous peoples' rights and development in the region. Three general areas of concern are to be tackled: (a) issues with respect to ownership and use of land and their natural resources, including related issues of environmental management; (b) cultural autonomy, including issues of language, education, and the protection of cultural and intellectual property; and (c) participation in formal decision-making processes of the state, particularly with respect to development, which also involves issues of citizenship. The programme will be led from the Philippines.

5. Another important step towards implementing the policy is the indigenous peoples' component within the human rights strengthening programme, a joint initiative between UNDP and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Three pilot projects focusing on building the capacity of indigenous peoples and their organizations at the country level will be designed in 2003.

6. The above-mentioned new initiatives, combined with national development programme activities and small grants programmes, are designed to address the needs of local communities and provide a range of channels for UNDP support to indigenous peoples.

Environment and development

Equator initiative

7. Another important recent development is the Equator Initiative Awards, which recognized 27 community groups that exemplify extraordinary achievement in reducing poverty through the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the Equatorial belt. Many of those awarded were indigenous communities from Kenya to India to Fiji. Building upon those local community initiatives, the Equator initiative, a UNDP partnership programme, is working to create a global movement to reduce poverty along with the conservation, sustainable use and equitable sharing of benefits from biodiversity.

8. That will be accomplished through a three-part programme, consisting of the prestigious award to recognize local achievements, learning exchange grants to foster South-South capacity-building, and the generation and sharing of knowledge to influence policy.

9. Since the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the Initiative has been working to capture the lessons from those community sustainable development models and disseminate them widely to help ensure that they contribute to policy development in the areas of poverty reduction, environmental management and biodiversity conservation. Workshops with awardees are being organized in 2003 to encourage learning exchanges.

World Summit on Sustainable Development

10. Despite the enormous contributions that civil society organizations have made to advancing the world's understanding of sustainable development, communities are generally the least well positioned to have a voice in international summits. In Johannesburg, their voices were heard in key policy forums. A central message to emerge from the Summit was that communities play a vital role in sustainable development.

11. At the community kraal in Ubuntu Village, for example, community leaders interacted with policy makers from Governments and development agencies and with civil society organizations and the media. The kraal, a community space set up by UNDP and hosted by some 100 community representatives from developing countries, was designed and managed to facilitate such interaction and sharing of lessons and knowledge among local communities.

12. One learning event at the kraal was a grass-roots academy on the Millennium Development Goals. Emphasizing that communities must be seen as actors rather than merely recipients, participants noted that community-based organizations were keen to enter into proactive partnerships with national Governments. The measurement of progress on the Goals has the potential of generating national dialogues and improving relations with national Governments.

13. Indigenous peoples emphasized that when implementing the Goals, indigenous peoples' visions of development — and their knowledge and sustainable practices that have been key to safeguarding the environment for centuries — should be taken into account.

Partnership with Denmark and Greenland home rule

14. UNDP was invited to be a key partner in a partnership launched at the Summit by the Government of Denmark and Greenland home rule on indigenous rights and sustainable development.

15. The partnership is aimed at enhancing the capacity of indigenous peoples to influence policy processes and decision-making in sustainable development. In addition, it is to promote knowledge-sharing between donor agencies and indigenous peoples.

Millennium Development Goals

16. Of utmost relevance and importance today is a framework that will be guiding our work and improving our cooperation: the Millennium Development Goals. The Goals, which range from eradicating extreme poverty and hunger to reducing child mortality to building a global partnership for development, were agreed upon at the Millennium Summit by over 150 world leaders.

17. The Goals are a vital framework for concerted and concrete actions in areas where the world needs them most. They signal recognition by all Governments that they confront an agenda of problems that can no longer be managed by and within countries alone. Although those are age-old challenges, what is unprecedented is the commitment of heads of state and government to a set of numerical and time-bound targets that address those key elements of human development. The Goals are to provide coherence and be integral to other processes. Their intention is to define priority areas of intervention.

18. Key to achieving them is development advice, advocacy, grant support to developing countries and improving strategic partnerships. UNDP sees indigenous peoples and their organizations as one of those partners. UNDP recognizes that ensuring the engagement of indigenous peoples and their organizations is critical in preventing and resolving conflict, enhancing democratic governance, reducing poverty and sustainably managing the environment.

19. In efforts to raise awareness of the Goals among indigenous peoples, stimulate debate around the issues and encourage indigenous peoples' participation in the campaign, UNDP held a round table at the Summit on indigenous peoples' perspectives on the Goals, which was co-sponsored with the Tebtebba Foundation of the Philippines.

20. A number of key concerns emerged. With regards to the implementation of the Goals, both the panellists and the audience questioned the kind of development paradigms that underpin the Goals, as well as the kinds of indicators that will be used to measure success or failure. Discussion also focused on some of the major obstacles to achieving the Goals, namely conflict; discrimination, lack of disaggregated data and land titles; and most importantly, the lack of recognition of indigenous peoples' rights. UNDP reaffirmed its commitment to work with indigenous peoples, in particular on initiatives in Asia and the Pacific. Among the proposed activities is to prepare an Asian regional human development report on indigenous peoples in the next few years.

Prior informed consent

21. In the inaugural session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, UNDP hosted a panel on the theme "Indigenous peoples and development: the importance of prior informed consent". The panel provided an opportunity to discuss the importance of free, prior informed consent to development programmes and plans involving indigenous peoples. Discussion focused on the impact that such an endorsement has at both the policy and grass-roots levels, as well as its correlation with the right to development. It reviewed how indigenous peoples' campaigns have led to the endorsement of the principle in international standards (including the UNDP policy document entitled "UNDP and indigenous peoples: a policy of

engagement") and national legislation, as well as the continuing struggles for its adoption in other international and national legislation and policies.

22. Since the issue generated much interest, at the 2002 meeting of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations UNDP again hosted a panel on free prior informed consent. UNDP is currently considering commissioning a study on prior informed consent vis-à-vis development.

Publication: indigenous peoples' case studies

Sharing best practices

23. UNDP commissioned a set of case studies aimed at reviewing the role of indigenous peoples and their organizations in preventing and resolving conflict. A publication is forthcoming.